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Ministry of Community and Social Services

Youth and Recreation Branch

Community Development For Leisure

Community development is a method of organizing, developing and employing the resources available to a community in order to improve the conditions of living and the quality of life for the people of the community.

In the leisure context community development is used to stimulate concern about the use of leisure, and to plan and develop community recreation activities that provide opportunities for people to use their increased free time for personal fulfilment and enjoyment of life.

Why We Need the Community Development Process

The 1967 report of the Economic Council of Canada contained this statement:

The character of a community depends on how closely its citizens identify with it and work to make it a better place. If urban government is to attract the calibre of elected representatives required to meet its challenge, it must provide adequate opportunities for the exercise of leadership, initiative and responsible decision-making . . . There are in our cities, growing problems of social segregation and stratification, of pressures upon the individual of the hurried pace of urban living, of conflicting conformity in the comfortable suburbs, and anonymity and lack of identification in the face of the immensity of the big city . . . a complex of challenges if the quality of human life is to be improved, if the fruits of economic progress are to be equitably shared, and if the human resources and human potential of an urban industrial society are to be fully developed.

Powerful social, economic and technological forces are at work in society today, demanding that our organizations, institutions and customary practices be reshaped and remade. By and large we are using archaic structures of social organization to attempt to solve the problems created by modern technology, or to deal with the opportunities it provides.

Why Should Anyone Strive for a Better Community?

Most people have faith in the future and in their fellow citizens, but they still strive for better communities. It has been said that everyone needs to face challenge and feel a sense of accomplishment. Community development offers opportunities for self-fulfilment particularly to those citizens who are not happy with the status quo.

Fortunately, the work of building good communities is contagious. Improvement of one phase of community life often leads to similar activity involving new people in another area. Community development work helps build pride and good morale. The more problems the citizens tackle, the more issues needing attention they are apt to discover. This cycle of continuous discovery and improvement gives satisfaction and significance to community life.

Through community development, people learn:

- the skills and techniques of diagnosing and analysing community practices
- to identify and define their problems and needs
- to establish priorities for action, how to organize and develop action groups, task forces, committees
- to find and use the resources available to them within their own communities and outside
- to be continuing learners and improvers as long as they live
- to improve their decision-making and their ability to take others into account.

Getting Started

Assessing the need is the important first step. A local committee with the help of a professional community development adviser undertakes a study of the community to determine the most urgent needs and to establish priorities for action. The committee will have to acquire sufficient knowledge of the history of the community and the problem, as well as the attitudes, habits and customs of the people to formulate a plan.

This diagnostic procedure requires skill in conducting surveys, conferences, meetings designed to uncover the real needs and problems of the community. Other bulletins in this series deal with the techniques of community conferences and the evaluation of recreation services.

Setting Goals

It is essential to bring the people who are to be the beneficiaries of the new program into the decision-making about goals and objectives. People are usually unwilling to accept or feel committed to programs that have been planned by others.

Goal-setting is not an easy task. Information is required, not only about the needs identified in the survey, but also about the local and external resources needed to achieve the objectives.

Establishing goals may require many small group meetings, a major conference, several consultations or other techniques.

Since the achievement of goals has a reinforcing value for the people involved in the process (nothing succeeds like success) the establishment of interim or short-term goals, divides the program into achievable steps and serves to encourage the group.

Another dimension of goal-setting is timing. The availability of resources at certain times, local customs and prac-

tices having to do with employment, vacations or the rhythm of community life must be considered in the determination of the sequence of events, and the times each event is to be undertaken.

Planning

The following activities represent the kinds of community development projects with which recreation groups might become involved:

- Conducting community education programs on such subjects as pollution, drug addiction, regional government
- Establishing new play areas and facilities
- Developing community schools
- Expanding the community use of schools
- Establishing new recreation programs or adult education classes
- Forming new groups: community service councils, social planning councils, sports associations, cultural groups and associations, social action groups, youth councils.

One step in the community development process that is often neglected as the preparation of the statement of aims and objectives, including a list of the means to achieve them. It should follow identification of needs, setting of priorities and objectives, and assessment of resources.

The following outline plan is stated in general terms. It represents the conclusions of many decisions by a local committee, perhaps with the help of a professional adviser. Many more decisions will have to be made by the committee and the participants, and more detailed statements prepared before action is taken on the activities selected.

Community Project

1 General objective:

- to improve the social climate of the community.

2 Specific objectives:

- develop means for the wise use of leisure
- enlarge the scope of adult education
- expand general knowledge

3 Activities to achieve objectives:

- help select and develop play areas
- begin literacy and basic education classes
- begin a social centre program
- establish a newspaper column on recreation activities

4 Resources needed:

- special advice on the selection and development of play areas
- funds to pay for development and program expenses
- training and resource materials for volunteer leaders
- space for adult education programs
- teachers, etc.

5 Evaluation questions: (Evaluation may lead to a new set of objectives and a repetition of the cycle.)

- are we achieving the objectives we stated?
- were the activities chosen the most appropriate?
- are the resources adequate?
- can the group continue without new kinds of assistance?

Leadership and Organization

In any community effort there must be some self-starters — some leadership which can keep the process going through rough and smooth. This kind of leadership is based more on dedication and concern for the community than on talent and ability to sway people. When a job needs to be done, a small group of highly motivated and well-informed citizens is worth more than a hundred great orators.

When establishing an organizational structure for any project, the working principle is: *do not over-organize.* Set up only enough machinery to get the job done; over-organization kills interest and takes too long.

Involve people who display the interest and capacity to make and carry out decisions. Too frequently recruitment to committees and task groups is a casual operation. Definite criteria should be applied to the selection of members for these groups. Their ability to make some specific contribution to the project, their interest and capacity for further growth as a person and so on, should be evaluated honestly. However, no pressure should be exerted on individuals to become involved.

Training Leaders

Providing training opportunities for local leadership is an important aspect of the community development process.

Before groups can take action on leisure education, pollution, community schools, or other question, they need to know as much as possible about these subjects. They also need to learn decision-making and problem-solving skills, how to work effectively in groups, how to establish objectives, how to select and use resources and so on.

With the help of a community development adviser, educational programs for committee members, program leadership and volunteer workers, should be planned as an integral part of the project.

The Government Role

A government agency such as the Youth and Recreation Branch of the Ontario Department of Education is involved in the process of community development. Its statement of purpose commits its resources to communities that seek to improve their physical, social and cultural environment, and to enrich the quality of life for their citizens. The consultants of the Branch help people learn to utilize the services, technical advice and assistance available to them from all government agencies.

However, the Branch's consultants represent the provincial government in their transactions with public and private agencies and institutions. It should be recognized that involvement in depth in a total project in any one community is not possible when each consultant must serve a large number of communities.

Resources for Community Development

The Youth and Recreation Branch has assembled many types of resources to assist and support community groups who are prepared to undertake community development programs.

Consultants will provide information and advice, when requested. They will assist in helping communities diagnose their needs, develop goals and objectives, provide training for local leaders. They will also suggest the resources available from government and other agencies. It is not, however, the consultant's duty to provide solutions to local problems. He does not approach a community problem as an expert with the solutions, but rather as a participant who brings time, interest, resources, and certain skills to a group of concerned individuals. His attitude is one of faith in people's ability to solve their own problems.